



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG PUBLIC PRESCHOOL TEACHERS
IN RURAL AREA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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(Human Resource Development)**

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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**WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG PUBLIC PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL
AREA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

Diannie Anak Pintan
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This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Human Resource Development)

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The project entitled 'Work-Related Stress Among Public Preschool Teachers In Rural Area: A Qualitative Study' was prepared by Diannie anak Pintan and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development)

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ABSTRACT

WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG PUBLIC PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL AREA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Diannie Anak Pintan

This study aimed to explore the challenges that cause stress experienced by rural preschool teachers. In particular, this study identified the perceptions of preschool teachers in defining their work-related stress based on their own experience, the challenges faced by preschool teachers related to work in performing duties and responsibilities as an educator, and strategies used by preschool teachers to in coping the challenges. There are eight (8) informants involved in this study who are preschool teachers chosen from Kanowit district rural schools. The case study design was used to conduct this study and the interview questions were constructed to be used as the instrument to obtain data and data collection is using the online method which is using Google Form. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the most appropriate informants for this study. The findings of this study have revealed the challenges faced by preschool teachers in the workplace that are related to teaching activities as well as including non-teaching tasks. Among the many challenges, majority of the informants mentioned non-teaching workloads and issues with parents of students as the main challenges. The findings of this study also show that social support and engaging in sports activities are among the strategies used by preschool teachers to deal with stress and as a measure to calm down from stress issues from the workplace. Finally, the findings from this study are useful as a recommendation for the school to realize the importance of paying attention to the work-related issues expressed by preschool teachers while to the HR team is to create awareness on the importance of understanding and protect the well-being of employees in the organization so that

employees feel valued and needed and provide exposure to employees regarding the strategies that should be taken when faced with stress in the workplace.

Keywords: preschool teachers, rural schools, stressful situations, challenges, strategies

ABSTRAK

TEKANAN BERKAITAN KERJA DI KALANGAN GURU PRASEKOLAH AWAM DI KAWASAN LUAR BANDAR: KAJIAN KUALITATIF

Diannie Anak Pintan

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka cabaran -cabaran yang menjadi punca kepada stress yang dialami oleh guru prasekolah luar bandar. Kajian ini juga dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti persepsi guru prasekolah dalam mendefinisikan tekanan kerja mereka berdasarkan pengalaman sendiri, cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru prasekolah yang berkaitan pekerjaan dalam melaksanakan tugas dan tanggungjawab sebagai seorang pendidik, dan strategi yang digunakan oleh guru prasekolah untuk menghadapi cabaran tersebut. Terdapat lapan (8) orang informan yang terlibat dalam kajian ini yang merupakan guru prasekolah yang dipilih dari sekolah luar bandar daerah Kanowit. Kaedah kajian kes telah digunakan untuk melaksanakan kajian ini dan soalan temubual dibina untuk digunakan sebagai instrumen bagi mendapatkan data dan pengumpulan data adalah menggunakan kaedah dalam talian iaitu menggunakan Borang Google. Persampelan bertujuan digunakan untuk mendapatkan informan yang paling sesuai untuk kajian ini. Penemuan kajian ini telah mendedahkan cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru prasekolah di tempat kerja iaitu berkaitan aktiviti mengajar serta termasuk tugas yang bukan mengajar. Antara cabaran-cabaran yang banyak dinyatakan ialah seperti beban kerja bukan pengajaran dan isu dengan ibu bapa murid. Penemuan kajian ini juga menunjukkan sokongan sosial dan melibatkan diri dengan aktiviti bersukan adalah antara strategi yang digunakan oleh guru prasekolah untuk menangani masalah stres dan sebagai langkah menenangkan diri daripada masalah stres dari tempat kerja. Akhir sekali, penemuan daripada kajian ini adalah berguna untuk pihak sekolah

menyedari pentingnya memberi perhatian kepada isu yang diutarakan oleh guru prasekolah manakala kepada kakitangan HR adalah untuk mewujudkan kesedaran tentang pentingnya menjaga dan memahami kebajikan pekerja dalam organisasi agar pekerja rasa dihargai serta diperlukan dan memberikan pendedahan kepada pekerja berkenaan langkah yang patut diambil apabila berhadapan dengan stress di tempat kerja.

Kata kunci: guru prasekolah, sekolah luar bandar, situasi tertekan, cabaran, strategi

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Malaysia Ministry of Education emphasizes to transforming the preschool education system to world-class quality (Majzub, 2013). Through the high-quality education system, it helps to promote and develop better education development and learning for our generation. Therefore, Malaysia needs to produce high-quality preschool teachers to performs these responsibilities. In public preschool, the teaching and learning process is teacher-centered who is responsible for conducting the learning session at school (Mustafa & Azman, 2013). In common, the job as a preschool teacher is a great career that makes them highly regarded and admired. People usually describe it as a simple job because they assume it only about teaching skills. However, it required high qualifications in education level and a high level of knowledge, skills, and abilities to become a preschool teacher. Only preschool teachers know how difficult their jobs are (Karacabey, 2017).

Preschool education provides educational features that are appropriate to the level of development needed to help preschoolers develop following environmental and cultural values in society (Poyraz & Dere, 2003 cited by Karacabey, 2017). The formal public preschool education system provided by the government is children will learn three essential knowledge such as reading, counting, and writing (Mustafa & Azman, 2013). Nearly 91% of children age four and five years old in Malaysia are registered at the preschool in 2014, even though pre-school education in this country is not compulsory (Malaysia, 2015; Wan, Sirat, & Razak, 2018).

As education is placed as fundamental for maintaining the development of the country's advancement (Eppley, 2015) the preschool teachers also face up with various challenges. The demands in educating preschool children may raise every preschool teacher's level of stress because the job is very complicated. Minister of Education, Dr. Maszlee Malik said from the result of a study conducted in 2017 there were 4.4% of teachers were found to be suffering from moderate level stress and the sources of the stress are like pressure from administration, workload, and lack of capability in performing tasks (Rohman, 2018).

1.2 Problem Statement

The past study is focused more on the relationship between stress factors and stress levels that concentrated on primary and high school teachers, however, there are fewer studies on stress among preschool teachers (Brazil, 2013). For example, Talwar, Xin, Wah, Yusoff, Bee, and Ghani (2019) show that there is a significant relationship between age, gender, family type, years of experience and marital status with stress among primary school teachers. Azhan, Majid, Marzuki and Majid (2016) identified the causes of stress and the most contributing factors causing stress among secondary school teachers were found to have significant relevance as hypotheses. Kavita and Hassan (2018) show the mean stress level score for teachers in secondary schools is higher than in primary schools with significant differences in the mean stress level for primary and secondary school teachers. However, there are limited studies explored how the stress factor contribute to the stress level among pre-school teachers. There also very limited qualitative study was done on this area. Thus, this research has explored the challenges of work-related stress experienced by public preschool teachers.

Moreover, there is a lot of researches on the issues of job stress among preschool teachers in the context of other countries. A study done by Adu and Okeke (2016) has been carried out in

the East London Education District to study the trigger of stress on preschool teachers which the finding revealed that various tasks were given and teaching pupils without adequate support are among the main causes of stress. Besides, a study done by Karacabey (2017) has been conducted in the center of Şanlıurfa, Turkey to identify problems such as administrative problems, programs and parents issues faced by preschool teachers and to explore either the teacher perceptions on problems that pre-school teachers encounter differ statistically significantly depending on the appearance of a helper in the class, school building type and the economic conditions of the neighbourhood in which the school located. Clipa and Boghean (2015) in their research investigated teachers' insight on stress factors and solutions to these stresses by applying a questionnaire to 150 teachers teaching in kindergartens from two Romanian provinces. The results of the study showed levels of stress among Romanian preschool teachers are high where almost half of them are thinking of quitting. Unfortunately, the research about stress among preschool teachers in Malaysia particularly in a local context like Sarawak is not fully explored. Therefore, this study will focus on the work-related stress experienced by public preschool teachers in the Sarawak context.

Next, the previous study mostly conducted at schools located in the urban area. One of the closest studies ever conducted in the past was a study by Tiong (1998) at selected urban secondary school in Sibul Division, Sarawak to investigate whether stress can enhance performance by examining the stress experienced by teachers. The findings of this study show that the students and workload factor are the main cause of teachers experiencing stress and 30.6% of respondents experience some stress, 44.7% face moderate stress, 18.8% experience strong stress and 5.9% experience very strong stress that clearly shows there was no teacher in the school free from work-related stress. Another study done at another country in their urban

areas is research by Ouellette, Frazier, Shernoff, Cappella, Mehta, Maríñez-Lora, Cua and Atkins (2017). The research performed by randomly choosing six Midwestern urban district schools to examine self-efficacy of the person level, student-level functioning, and organizational wellbeing at the school level as predictors of the stress and satisfaction of the teachers. The results of this research show that there is no significant difference between satisfaction or stressful situations associated with teacher work. However, there are not many studies that explored stress that focuses on preschool teachers in the rural area and that causes a lack of academic information to support this research especially in the investigation related to the strategies used by preschool teachers to cope with their stress. Therefore, the scope of this study focused on stress among preschool teachers in the rural area especially the strategies used by pre-school teachers in coping with their job stress.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research is to explore the work-related stress experienced by public preschool teachers in the rural area.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To find out the work-related stress that preschool teachers are experiencing.
- ii. To identify the challenges faced by the public pre-school teachers.
- iii. To identify the strategies that can be used by public pre-school teachers to cope with work-related stress.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the work-related stress that preschool teachers are experiencing?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by public pre-school teachers?

- iii. What are the strategies that can be used by public pre-teachers in coping with work stress?

1.5 Significance of Study

Most of the previous studies on stress and the job as an educator has focused on secondary and elementary teachers, there is less study have investigated stress among teachers who teach at preschool. Thus, this study has given some importance to the parties either directly or indirectly.

First, this study gives a contribution to the body of knowledge. From the previous studies, some information will be used and developed based on the relevance of this study in order to obtain and construct additional information. So, the reader will be able to extend their knowledge about preschool teachers in the content of Sarawak rural area and related to preschool management. The finding from this study will be a useful material that can be used as references for academic purposes and future study purposes which will help future researchers to explore in-depth about work-related the stress experienced by public preschool teachers in the rural area setting.

Secondly, this study also contributed as an input to the Ministry of Education on the importance of the pre-school teacher workforce and keep developing the resilience of pre-school teachers' ability to face the demands of changing globalization. Therefore, the government needs to find remedy and improve the current training and courses to train and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities of preschool teachers. The community also will able to acknowledge the pre-school teachers as an important profession which help to shape the new generation and the pre-school teachers have their own big challenges in fulfilling the responsibilities.

Lastly, the findings from this study helps stakeholders in the Human Resources Department to identify the characteristics of stress among employees and builds strategies on how to cope with work stress. Employees should also receive appreciation, rewards, or benefits from the company for the appreciation of their efforts and success in performing the tasks. Besides, as a guide for the Human Resources Practitioner to fix the training module and implement only the necessary and related training with the employee's job descriptions. For example, job redesigns important to reduce the workload. Next, to take care of the employees' well-being and as motivation in the future, the implementation of an awareness program that should involve every party such as an awareness program about mental health and work-life balance.

1.6 Limitations of Study

There were few limitations in conducting this study. One of it is limited in rural areas. Informants are only selected from Sarawak rural areas where pre-school from other state divisions are not included for this study. The selection of areas to obtain informants for this study has been set and focused only on preschools in rural areas, which is Kanowit district only. Thus, rural preschools from other districts are not included and cause the data collected does not cover the views of all rural preschool teachers. Moreover, this study also does not include the preschool from the urban area in which the result of data collection may not suitable to represent the whole preschool.

Second, the interview of this study unable to conducted face-to-face due to the school close following the announcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) which start on 18 Mac 2020. Hence, the interview questions converted into the form of Google Form and answered by informants through this tool. As a limitation, the diversity of data for this study was not

achievable. The non-verbal cues are unable to be captured especially the body language which is not possible in online surveys. In other words, the level of enthusiasm informants in answering the question on discussion topics cannot be seen. Besides, the behaviors and emotions of the informants cannot be seen too.

Lastly, this study focuses only on public preschool teachers. Thus, the findings of the study may not be appropriate for other settings such as to represent private preschool teachers. On top of that, the finding of this study is also less suitable to be used as a reference for other aspects such as research related to work stress among primary and secondary school teachers.

1.7 Definition of terms

1.7.1 Pre-school teacher

Pre-school teachers are a type of profession as the early childhood educator which teaching children aged four to six at the pre-school level before the kids enter primary school (Early Childhood Preschool Teacher, 2017). The preschool teacher guides and coordinates the activities in or outside class, such as singing, storytelling, playing games, and arts which aim to develop and nurture the physical and social development of preschoolers (Hudson, 2017).

For this study, preschool teachers are referred to someone who works as a preschooler's educator at a public school in the rural area.

1.7.2 Teachers stress

The general characteristics of stress are tired, fatigue, worry, easily get angry, and overburden. At the workplace, stress is an emotional feeling of employees when facing job demands and an unpleasant environment. Robbins and Judge (2012) cited from Mohamed (2018) which mentioned stress is an uncomfortable psychological process that occurs in response to

stresses on the environment. Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, and Veen (2018) state that the cause of stress is the accumulation of aspects of work content and work situations that affect the cognitive level, motivation, and emotions of employees.

In the area of education, Kyriacou (2001, p. 2) cited by Skaalvik, and Skaalvik (2016), the term teacher stress is defined as the experience mix with the displeasing emotions from aspects of the job as an educator. The displeasing emotions negatively lead to feelings of less self-worth and unsatisfied with accomplishment in their professional role. Teacher stress also can be explained as the experience of unpleasant, negative emotions encounter by teachers that consequences from some aspects of the job (Kyriacou, (2001) cited by Harmsen et al., (2018). As stated by van Veldhoven (1996) cited by Harmsen et al., (2018) teacher stress includes two items it is causes of stress and responses of stress.

In the context of this study, teacher stress is referred to work-related stress that experienced by the public pre-school teachers in meeting the demands of many responsibilities and challenges at the workplace in the rural area besides as an educator to the pre-school pupils.

1.7.3 Rural area

Generally, the rural area defined as a district in which countryside far from the urban area or cities (Admin, 2018). In rural areas, there is a lack of buildings and facilities because the living is more to simple and traditional life (Rutledge, Ramroop, Boudreau, McDaniel, Teng, Sprout, Costa, Hall, & Hunt, 2011). Besides, the cost of living in rural area are lower than living in urban areas because of people able to live life with farming activities and farm business.

In this study, rural area is mention as a location where pre-school teachers working in public school particular Kanowit district.

1.8 Summary

In short, this study is focused on exploring the work-related stressors experienced by public preschool teachers in rural areas. This chapter has discussed the background of the study followed by an explanation of the problem statements that have been identified. Next, general and specific objectives were stated to support the purpose of the study. Then, research questions were developed in line with the objectives of the study. Besides that, the significance of the study also has been discussed to emphasize the importance and contribution of the study. Limitations of the study have been discussed in this chapter as well. Finally, the terms preschool teachers, teacher stress, and rural areas were determined to explain the terms that will be frequently used in this study. This chapter ends with a summary.